Political Turmoil in Canada

By J. A. STEVENSON

Ottawa, Canada, April, 1920.

THE political session at Ottawa has opened in considerable confusion and uncertainty. A year ago Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the leader of one of the great historic parties of Canada, died, full of years and honor and ere 1919 ended, his rival, Sir Robert Borden, found his health so seriously impaired that he was compelled to contemplate withdrawal from public life. He had carried a very heavy burden since 1914 and the worries of the Peace Conference were too much for his weakened vitality. Since 1917 he had led a coalition government composed of Conservatives and such Liberals as supported the policy of conscription. It was a loose alliance and has resisted all attempts to transform it into a homogeneous party.

A group of Western radicals headed by Mr. T. A. Crerar, Minister of Agriculture, revolted in May, 1919, rather than accept a protectionist budget, and proceeded to form an independent cross-bench group. Several by-elections were lost to farmer candidates and as a result while the government could count on 153 supporters out of 235 when the House first met in 1918, their following is now reduced to 135, of whom only 25 are Liberals.

As long as the war lasted, the government carried on its task of promoting Canada's war effort with considerable acceptance and efficiency but once the incentive of the great struggle was removed, decay seemed to set in. It passed some excellent reforms such as woman's suffrage, it reorganized the civil service, and it made reasonable plans for the re-establishment of the army in civil life, but it failed in many other vital matters. It could not or would not cope with profiteering and failed to levy proper direct taxation. If Canada had paid direct taxes on the same scale as New Zealand, she could have raised by them during the war years 400 per cent more than she actually has done. The coalition suffered from the common vice of all coalition—the lack of a coherent mind—and it speedily lost popular confidence till it would be wanton flattery today to say that its good repute was in every man's mouth.

When Sir Robert Borden proposed to retire last December, the first difficulty was the choice of a successor. Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior, was the obvious successor if the majority of the coalition insisted upon a Conservative as premier. He is young, only 44, an excellent speaker, an experienced administrator, and a first-rate parliamentarian and political advocate. He is a firm Conservative and has all the qualifications to lead a Conservative party. But the Liberal members of the coalition could not forget his unyielding partisanship in the past and announced that they must decline to follow him. They suggested for premier J. A. Calder, of Saskatchewan, now Minister of Immigration, but the Conservative rank and file would have no one but Mr. Meighen. His selection meant an immediate election as the Conservatives would not command a majority in the House of Commons. This in view of the growing strength of the farmer and labor movements was the last thing desired.

Desperate pressure was put upon Sir Robert to retain at least the titular premiership and give the coalition time to come to a decision as to its future. Sir Robert, very reluctantly and against the advice of his physicians, agreed to this course with the understanding that he would be troubled by no public duties. So he withdrew to sail with Lord Jellicoe from the West Indies to Britain and took the premiership of Canada into retirement with him. He has now returned to this side of the Atlantic and will take a prolonged holiday at some southern resort. It is an extraordinary state of affairs and is arousing considerable criticism in Canada. Sir George Foster will act as premier and the party managers will endeavor to stave off the fateful decisions which sooner or later must be taken till they can get definite news of Sir Robert's health. They will avoid all controversial legislation which might cause a cleavage in their own ranks and will cater for the support of the Conservative elements in the country.

The Liberal opposition numbers 84, of whom two-thirds are French Canadians, the conscription issue having solidified Quebec on the Liberal side. The Liberal leader, chosen last August, is Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King, the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, the radical whose rebellion in 1837, though crushed, won self-government for Canada. Mr. King was Minister of Labor from 1908 to 1911. He has specialized in labor problems and is the author of a book called "Industry and Humanity." He has many qualifications for leadership, being a good speaker and an enlightened student of affairs, but he has some handicaps. He is not a "mixer" and his mind works too slowly for success in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate. Himself a sincere progressive, he will find some difficulty in inducing all his followers to accept the full implications of the somewhat advanced program which the Liberal convention drew up last year. The French Canadian of Quebec is a Liberal on constitutional and imperial matters but on social and economic problems he is the most conservative element in Canada. Many of them distrust the radicalism of the West and regard public ownership as an impossible heresy. The Liberal opposition is thus in the awkward position of being committed to a radical program while the main body of its existing electoral support is of a distinctly conservative tinge. Not that there is a dearth of progressive influence in Quebec; Mr. Ernest Lapointe, on whom the mantle of Sir Wilfrid Laurier as leader of French-Canadian Liberalism has fallen, is a sincere reformer and commands the steady allegiance of a group of younger members at Ottawa. But the Conservative forces of the country remember that from 1878 to 1896 Quebec was a safe buttress of the protective tariff and other reactionary institutions and are laying plans, not without some hope of success, to win support in that province.

It is a distrust of the reality of Quebec's progressivism which prevents the reforming elements in Ontario and the western provinces from rallying to the Liberal banner and induces them to throw their whole weight behind the new Farmer and Labor parties. Mr. Crerar, who leads the agrarian group in the House, has at present sixteen followers but after the next election he is expected to have at least seventy and Labor will boast of more than a dozen members. It is even just possible that a well organized alliance of the Farmer and Labor cohorts, such as was worked out at the Ontario provincial election last fall, might give them a majority of seats in a new parliament. In this event there would probably be a repetition of the course of events in Australia where the growing strength of the Laborites drove the two old parties into fusion. In Canada it is more likely that the result of the next election which cannot be long delayed, will see three groups of almost equal strength returned.

The radical progressives will keep pushing their advanced program and will force the Liberals to come to a decision as to which side of the fence they intend to come down upon. By the time the issue becomes acute there will have been born out of the coalition a new Conservative party endowed with some high-sounding name like "National" and to it such of the Liberals now in opposition, who want the brakes applied to the chariot of reform, will migrate. The sincerely progressive spirits in the Liberal camp will join Mr. Crerar and his followers and it would be unsafe to prophesy which party would command a majority. But whether the reforming party held office or not, a most desirable change would have been accomplished in Canadian politics.

There would be in evidence a new political alignment which would represent a real cleavage in ideals and aspirations and be a vast improvement upon the hypocrisies and compromises of the past, when two parties, differing little in their basic principles, have been conducting a series of sham battles. There would be a possibility of setting two distinct ideals before the country. On one side there would be advocated a continuation of the economic status quo with the high protective tariff, political jobbery, wasteful exploitation of natural resources and a cutthroat anti-social industrial policy as its cardinal features.

The other party would aim to abolish economic and social privileges of an unjust kind as far as is humanly possible, conserve the resources of the country for the benefit of its inhabitants, improve the institutions of Canada so that they would become the envy of other nations and attract immigrants in thousands to her shores, and try to obtain for the mass of the people that level of well being and happiness, which the share of wealth bestowed by nature on the Dominion ought to yield with certainty.

On the one side there would be visible a narrow, egotistical nationalism, and on the other a broad international outlook such as befits a country whose population is composed of diverse racial strains. The battle between these two hostile ideals is now being staged in Canada, as in every other country, and the first serious round of the conflict cannot be long delayed.

Too Much Sugar There

THIS from a recent edition of the Liverpool, England, Courier will be read with interest by most Americans: "Viscount Devonport, chairman of the Port of London Authority, made some interesting revelations about the congestion of the port in his evidence yesterday before the Industrial Court inquiring into the dockers' demand for a minimum wage of 16s. a day.

"He declared that there is at present in cold storage meat sufficient with home-killed to last for three months, while another two months' supply is waiting to be discharged.

"There was great congestion of wool, and there was enough tea for many months to come. The port was filled up with sugar, yet the government was now bringing over 50,000 tons to be dealt with next month.

"'We shall be overwhelmed with sugar,' said the witness, 'and may have to lock and bar the port against it.'"

American Locomotives in France

RELATIVE to locomotives for French railways, a writer for the Manchester, England, Guardian, says: "In France there should be, at least for a few years, a favorable opening for British manufacturers, although American competition will be very severe. The French railway companies, prior to the war, depended upon private firms for their supply of locomotives.

"During the war a considerable number of engines were constructed in the United Kingdom and in the United States for French railways, but the tendency of late seems to have been for the Americans to do the bulk of the work. From information which has reached the writer, the unsettled state of the labor market and the consequent inability of British firms to guarantee quick delivery has had more to do with this result than the question of prices."

Germany at Work

COLONEL WILLIAM HENSLEY, the American military observer, after five months' observation in Germany, says: "Work is the key that the Germans are using to reopen the treasure houses of the world. Already immense progress has been made, so much so that the spirit of the people has been lifted; hope and ambition have replaced despair, and sloth and agitation are dying out. I was especially interested in aeronautics and learned some things that amazed me. The Germans are going into aeronautics with tremendous determination, and are building metal planes with capacity for 28 passengers."

Alaska's Slow Mail Service

By THOMAS B. DRAYTON

Seward, Alaska, March, 1920.

HE WOULD be a pessimist indeed who could think that the agents of the United States Post Office Department intentionally sent astray those heaps of parcel post consigned to Ellsworth's, chief local representative of Santa Claus, that the children of Kenai Peninsula should be denied the joys of Christmas toys. Indeed, the delivery at Seward of those belated yuletide wares just in time for Lincoln's birthday, in fair to middling condition, and all plainly stamped with official formality "Missent to Sitka, Alaska" is ample proof to a generous mind that only negligent incompetence underlies that postal misadventure, and no invidious design against the hopes and happiness of the youngsters was entertained.

But even if those of pessimistic bent could assign color of reason for such unkindly suspicion, surely, thrice surely, their iconoclasm could not imagine a letter from his chief to a humble craftsman in the writing trade being purposely delayed three months or so by a useless voyage of nine thousand miles.

True, when one considers that, with four lone exceptions every business house in Seward, as proved by actual census, has lost or had missent one or more pieces of mail matter within the year; and that the constant quips and jests, not to mention howls, seen in the local press of other territorial towns evidence a similar state of things; those pessimistic ones may reasonably ask why the Alaskan mail service is the most inefficient in the Universal Postal Union.

The immediate cause of this is that on August 1, 1918, Alaskan mail matter was reduced from the status prevailing in the States, and classified as common freight; since which time it has been handled with that punctilious care and expedition accorded lumber, machinery, fertilizer, and similar lines of merchandise, but with rather less consideration than potatoes, fruits, and other perishable commodities. The ostensible reason for this amazing policy and practice, the reason publicly assigned by the United States Post Office Department, was economy. The actual and covert reason was to punish the people of Alaska for alleged insolence.

Even the most obtuse would understand that Alaskans are a bad lot, despite the solicitous ministrations of innumerable bureaucratic agencies, and long-continued but entirely fruitless efforts to inspire them with a properly obsequious homage for their carpet-bag masters in governmental authority. That the stranger to bureaucratic conditions in Alaska may understand this admitted lack of reverence, it should be said that the Alaskan who really counts, the Alaskan who must be dealt with at the final showdown, is merely a transplanted New England Yankee, or Georgia Cracker, or Michigan Wolverine, or Illinois Sucker, or adventurous product of some other subdivision of the United States, transplanted in a new and intolerable governmental environment; and, to a very considerable extent, transplanted before he had been refined and polished much below the standard of individual liberty of the period of Andrew Jackson. Men of that type had come to Alaska and were uncovering its matchless mineral riches; were turning a primeval wilderness into a land of homes and plenty; were accumulating wealth and seizing the advantages that wealth confers. When this was noticed by the political place-hunters in the United States Alaska's doom was sealed. Almost overnight the pack of ravenous political jackals were upon us, and their number and voracity have constantly increased until today Alaska lies ruined, helpless and resentful beneath the weight—not of one bad government, but of many separate, duplicating, conflicting, despotic bureaucratic governments operating simultaneously and virtually independently.

To excuse their useless employment, to justify their official status, to create some specious pretext for their existence, ninety per cent and more of these political sinecurists are driven to the concoction of administrative projects, contrivances, schemes, and burdensome formalities and endless regulations, that culminate in but one sole and invariable result—senseless botheration to the private citizen.

The bureaucratic grips have been tightened about the throat of Alaska; military detachments have gradually been increased and scattered throughout the territory; in peaceful pioneer villages where disorder is unknown the soldiery of the United States parades with spectacular insouciance. Within sight of where this is written United States regulars loaf in idleness, and wait. Bureaucracy knows it has overplayed the game; that it has ruined Alaska as a whole; that it has swept away the fortunes of the men who made Alaska. The citizens of Alaska know that a continuance of existing bureaucratic administrative conditions is incompatible with the self-respect of decent men.

The hords of parasitic sinecurists who employ Alaska as a pretext for living off the public treasury, realize that cohesion is indispensable to a continuity of their tenure; that however bitter the plots, intrigues and machinations of the rival bureaus to usurp additional functions and extend their individual power may be, their very existence depends upon their standing together as an indivisible unit against the people and public interests. The policy of bureaucratic spoliation having ruined Alaska and developed resentments involving peril, it has been followed by the correlated policy of anticipating such resentments of its victims and weakening their power at every point. The Alaskan Division of the postal services—weak numerically, and of negligible consequence in itself—is but an incident and a tool under the coercive influence of dominant bureaucratic agencies; and therein lies the dual purpose of the classification of Alaskan mail as common freight—an injury to the people tending to weaken their morale.